

A review article on “kente cloth in home furnishings”- overview

Abstract

In the African community, artwork and existence reflects one another. African art has its own past, aesthetic idea and a strong psychological content. The native African fabric has its own aesthetic symbolic usage, motifs, colors and emotions. This paper is about unique pattern designs inspired by a Ghanaian fabric called the kente cloth and its usage in home furnishings. The patterns are designed with inspiration from Ghanaian traditions like cultural elements, nature and symbols. The idea of the study is that creating home furnishing products like curtains cushion covers etc., to decorate interior and exterior space. Textile scheming is an intrinsic part of textile manufacturing in West Africa. This article about Kente cloth in home furnishings gives the idea about usage of unique designs of the West Africans in textile in home furnishings. This study also helps in enhancing the texture and aesthetic qualities of the products and its level of attaining success in the market. As the designs produced are different and they explain the emotions or ideas of the people they have great value to produce variety in style. These products with by developing varieties in design and achieve a great success in the global market. This article revolves about the history of Kente cloth, the designs involved in production and its ability to succeed in the home furnishing market.

Keywords: kente, home furnishings, Ghanaians, West Africa

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Introduction

Africa is a huge country which is the home to hundreds of different ethnic people who speak over seven hundred languages. The creativity of these natives is displayed by their adaptation to habitat and development in unique textiles. The production of these textiles takes most amounts of time and effort. These textiles bring out their ideas and indigenous beliefs. The Asante of Ghana couturier for the monsoon and tropical seasons in West Africa. The Ashanti people design “Kente” cloth. Kente cloth is fabricated by men into limited strips that are later fastening by sewing to make larger cloths. They convey their meaning by contours that are quite diverse. Kente is tightly woven colorful fabric. It is woven for special occasions like weddings, funerals as a sign of royalty. The woven strips are six feet long and five to six feet wide. Traditionally the size, pattern, color are selected by the gender, age, marital status and social status. There are about 300 varieties of designs and each are named uniquely. Kente cloth remains as a symbol of pride to their motherland. Now days, Kente cloth is adopted as a fashion statement by the people rather than exhibiting their royalty. And these Kente designs are available with printed geometric patterns. The narrow strips of fabrics are woven by using double heddle looms. The weaving machines are of simple construct that they hold set of yarns in pull, as this arrangement has no pull on the warp beam so load is used to give pull during weaving. Weaving is also the skilful technique that is known in Ghana. Before the introduction of weaving in Ghana they used materials from bark of KyenKyen tree. Limited bits of kyenkyen bark is mollified in water and beaten over trunks of fallen trees with wooden hammers into some way or another adaptable material that was utilized as a covering. At the point when cotton and expensive silk fabrics came into the Gold Coast from Europe and Asia the Asante individuals disentangled the yarns and skillfully wove them into lavish Kente materials of the considerable number of assortments of shading and example. Kente stayed as an indication of sovereignty and affluent when they are woven with silk yarns. Asante Kente is a woven fabric that is recognized

by its stunning, multi-shaded examples of brilliant hues, geometric shapes and strong structures. It likewise speaks to what depicts as the ‘imaginative, attentive or creator’s woven fabric. Kente is absolutely the most extreme popular and top notch respected of every African material because of the reality it is created in additional segments, traded to additional spots, and fused into a more noteworthy decent variety of structures than some other African texture. Asante Kente has likewise caught the consideration of guests since at any rate 1817 as a material of wonder, of extreme cost and mind blowing size and weight. Kente weavers’ now-a-days do western styles and incorporate them into stoles to attract the youth and foreigners. They also design fashionable cloth bags, shoes, dresses, belts etc., to improve their sales and reach out to the people. This has a great value locally and internationally. Consumers’ preference for kente cloth is growing and kente cloth can be used for unlimited innovative products like cushion covers, curtains, socks, wallet etc. This examination is an exploratory one to join West African material structure topics in a ‘the modern interior space’ and considers configuration pieces and adornments that will add some polish and contact to those spaces. Enthusiasm for these textures additionally mirrors a progressively comprehensive tasteful and social thankfulness that has developed in the West in the course of the only remaining century. The components found on these textures have fascinating shapes and courses of action that have not been done ‘deliberately’. The mix of an expansiveness of hues and the different sizes of these themes give a totally new standpoint to these structures. Evidently, every one of these textures are intended for dressing, however with broad investigation on the topic, it is obvious that motivations drawn from existing indigenous textures from different nations over the locale would be fitting for use for upholstery, divider boards, hard inside surfaces and delicate outfits. A further investigation is being done on such subjects by catching these to produce structures for surfaces in the interior certain, for example, blinds, wall papers and partitions.. This also mainly focuses in the incorporation of African patterns and sustainable interior

design materials in the creation of aesthetically appealing spaces, research needs to be done to investigate the sustainable materials and practices that can be used in other areas of design specialization. With the advancement of technology comes new challenges and opportunities, designers and artists are ready to adapt to the change in globalization.¹⁻¹⁵

Kente cloth

Kente which is familiar as nwentoma in Akan is a sort of interwoven strips of fabric. It is made by the ethnic people of Ghana a place in West Africa. It is constructed by the strip weave method. Kente originated in the Akan empire of Bonoman. This weaving technique is inspired from a spider spinning its web. People say, two brothers went for poaching and they found the spider spinning its web. They were really amazed by its work and they made the first Kente cloth from the white and black fibers of tree called raffia. When this woven cloth was presented to the king he was very much inspired with its look and he thought the fabric could be more colorful when dyed. So the Ghanaians started inventing dyes from barks of the trees and seeds of certain plants dyed the yarns and did weaving. For instance, blue color from the indigo tinctoria, dried cam wood gave red color; brown color from tamarind and boiled spinach leaves gives green color.¹⁶⁻¹⁸

It is marked as the visual representation of Akan culture, history and social values. Kente is made of cotton and silk in olden days. Later the shortage of silk yarn is replaced by Rayon. Now a day's cotton, rayon and polyester yarns are used for weaving. Cotton yarns can be used for plain weave fabrics whereas rayon and polyester can be used for design weave. The woven strips are about four inches wide and six feet long. For women, 24 strips of woven cloth is sewn together which has 21 motifs in it and for men, 28 woven strips are sewn together which has 39 motifs. Here each cloth conveys a distinctive meaning. The time taken to weave a simple design is one to four weeks and for a complex design two to six months. So the production rate varies according to the design. Kente cloth is used to mark a spiritual power, social status, wealth and cultural sophistication.

Patterns and designs of kente

Kente which is also known as Asante Kente is characterized by the geometric shapes with bright colors along the length of fabric. The patterns found in the weave are geometric shapes like rectangle, diamond, zigzag and square. The designs applied on the fabric are dramatic and visually stunning. But the designs and colors involved show a wide range of variations in the meaning. Those colors that are used in the cloth convey some message, proverb or the idea of the weaver. The cloth they weave symbolizes democracy, unity, responsibility, royalty, ingenuity, excellence, elegance, wealth, perfection and superior craftsmanship etc., the warp and weft used in weaving of kente cloth are uniquely woven and they have their distinctive name and meaning. Adweneasa is the name of the cloth which is especially used for the kings. And the largest known kente cloth is “Tikne Noko Adjina” means “one head cannot go into the council” handover to United Nations by an earlier Ghanaian head of state. These names are assigned by some special personalities, religious and cultural beliefs and political ideologies.¹⁸⁻²³

Colors of kente

Kente cloth has richness in colors and variety in patterns. Kente patterns are woven with several rich colors and each color has their own meaning.

- a. Yellow – correlates egg yolk. Represents holiness, royalty, wealth and beauty.
- b. Green – associated with plants. Represents growth, fertility, renewal and good health.
- c. Red – associates with blood. Represents political, spiritual beliefs, sacrifice and bloodshed.
- d. Blue – links to sky. Represents harmony, peace, good fortune.
- e. Pink – associated with feminine essence and life. Represents tenderness, happiness and sweetness.
- f. White – associated with egg white, clay. Represents healing and purity.
- g. Gold - linked to a precious metal. Represents wealth, royalty and prestige.
- h. Maroon – color of mother earth. Represents protection and healing.
- i. Silver – associated with moon. Represents joy, purity and serenity.
- j. Grey – linked to ashes. Represents spiritual healing.
- k. Black – linked to aging. Represents strength, energy and maturation.

Design

For a person who loves design whether it is in fashion or home décor, knows well that it is all about trends. While coming to trends it keeps on changing but some trends never fade away. In 1980's and 1990's kente cloth was in popular trend in clothing as well as in home décor. It was the primary pattern in all the clothing and textiles used by the West Africans. As the motifs and colors used in the cloth conveyed a specific meaning these can range from good fortune, harmony, spiritual healing etc., these designs that are bought through weaving in ancient days are now implemented as printable ones. These printable designs take less time to be implemented in the fabric than the woven cloth. These printable patterns on the cloth could increase the production rate. These printed cloths are lighter in weight and easier to clean while woven cloths are heavier.

Application in home furnishings

Avante garde inner space is characterized by elements that impart contemporaneity and automation. Twenty first century demands highly organized and modern interior space. Kente cloth with its highly appealing colors and variety in patterns can be used in cushion covers, curtains, wall coverings, table cloths etc., this improves the aesthetic look of the living area and the colors used can influence the mood of the person in the home.^{24,25}

Conclusion

Cloth is considered as the wordless means of communication. Kente cloth with its distinctive rich color palette associates with wealth and celebration. Kente cloth symbolizes the life of people with its distinctive motifs and colors in it. The usage of Kente patterns in modern interior space adds elegance and aesthetic look to the interior space. This creates aesthetically appealing spaces. This exploratory study revolves around incorporating West African fabric design ideas in modern interior space. The blends of colors, motifs and patterns gives a completely new look to the interior.

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Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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